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Weight Status and Cigarette and Electronic Cigarette Use in Adolescents

Joanne Delk, MS, MeLisa R. Creamer, PhD, MPH, Cheryl L. Perry, PhD, and Melissa B. Harrell, PhD, MPH

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living, UTHealth, School of Public Health in Austin, Austin, Texas

Abstract

Introduction—Research shows that adolescents who are overweight or obese may be at greater risk of cigarette smoking, and that this relationship may vary by gender. However, this relationship is understudied for electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes). Given the high rate of adolescent obesity and the rise in e-cigarette use in adolescents, this relationship should be investigated.

Methods—Data are from the third wave (collected October 2015–January 2016) of the Texas Adolescent Tobacco and Marketing Surveillance system. Students were in the seventh, ninth, and 11th grades ($n=2,733$) from five counties surrounding four major Texas metropolitan areas (Houston, Austin, San Antonio, Dallas). Weighted logistic regression was used to determine if weight status (healthy weight, overweight, or obese) was correlated with ever and past 30-day cigarette or e-cigarette use, controlling for sociodemographics. Models were stratified by gender. Data analyses were conducted in March 2017.

Results—Compared with healthy weight boys, obese boys had higher odds of past 30-day e-cigarette use (AOR=3.45, 95% CI=1.34, 8.33) and cigarette smoking (AOR=4.52, 95% CI=1.32, 15.51). There was no significant relationship between weight status and cigarette or e-cigarette use in girls.

Conclusions—This study supports that there is a positive relationship between weight status and past 30-day cigarette and e-cigarette use for boys, but that there is no association for girls.

INTRODUCTION

Obesity and tobacco use are two of the most prominent health concerns facing youth today.¹ The latest national estimates indicate that 34% of adolescents, aged 12 to 19 years, are overweight or obese.² In 2015, nationally, 9.3% of high school students had smoked cigarettes and 16.0% had used electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) in the past 30 days. Among

Address correspondence to: Melissa B. Harrell, PhD, MPH, 1616 Guadalupe Street, Suite 6.300, Austin TX 78701. melissa.b.harrell@uth.tmc.edu.

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middle school students 2.3% had smoked a cigarette in the past 30 days, and 5.3% had used an e-cigarette.³

Although a positive cross-sectional relationship between weight status and cigarette smoking in adolescence has been observed in many studies, the literature overall is mixed.^{4–8} Additionally, few articles have examined the theoretical basis for these relationships.^{9,10} Studies have indicated that cigarette use and physical inactivity co-occur,¹¹ whereas cigarette smoking and increased consumption of fast food and sugar sweetened beverages cluster together.¹² Additionally, obese youth suffer from peer-victimization, depression, stress, and social marginalization at greater rates than their healthy weight peers,^{13–16} and preliminary evidence shows this may be a factor linking obesity and cigarette smoking.¹⁰ There is also evidence that individuals, predominately females, use cigarettes as a weight control tool.^{6,17,18} Lastly, Zeller et al.⁹ reported that youth with excess weight are more likely to have risky attitudes about cigarettes, such as decreased harm perceptions, and have more friends who smoke and friends who did not disapprove of smoking.

To date, no published studies have reported on the relationship between e-cigarette use and weight status. This study examines the associations between weight status and ever or past 30-day use of either cigarettes or e-cigarettes, and if the associations differ by gender, as past research suggest that they might.^{4–6}

METHODS

Study Sample

This is a cross-sectional analysis of data from the third wave of the Texas Adolescent Tobacco and Marketing Surveillance system (TATAMS). TATAMS enrolled 3,907 adolescents at baseline in the five counties that surround the four largest cities in Texas—Austin, Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas/Ft. Worth. These students represented 461,069 in the sampling frame. Details about the study design are presented elsewhere.¹⁹ The third wave was collected from November 2015 to January 2016. It was completed by 2,733 subjects for a weighted response rate of 66.9%. Parental consent and student assent were obtained for all subjects. The University of Texas Health Science Center's IRB approved this study (reference number HSC-SPH-13-0377).

Measures

Students were asked about their ever use and past 30-day use of cigarettes and e-cigarettes. BMI percentiles were calculated using self-reported heights and weights.²⁰ Four weight status categories of underweight (<5th percentile), healthy weight (5th–84th percentile), overweight (85th–94th percentile) and obese (≥95th percentile) were created. Covariates include gender, grade, race/ethnicity (coded as Hispanic, white/other, and black) and a single item SES question.²¹

Statistical Analysis

Subjects were excluded from analysis if they were in the underweight category ($n=94$), provided biologically implausible height/weight information ($n=25$),²² or provided

incomplete data ($n=90$). The remaining 2,524 participants were weighted to represent 423,900 adolescents in the study area.

Twenty-four separate logistic regression models were used to test if being obese versus healthy weight or overweight versus healthy weight were associated with e-cigarette and cigarette ever and past 30-day user status. Models were adjusted for gender, race/ethnicity, SES and grade, to estimate AORs and 95% CIs. All relationships were examined overall and stratified by gender. All analyses used sampling weights to account for the complex design, the clustering of participants within schools, nonresponse bias, and to generalize to the study population. Analyses were conducted in SAS, version 9.4, March 2017.

RESULTS

The participant demographics stratified by gender are presented in Table 1. Overweight youth, when compared with healthy weight youth, did not have increased odds of ever or past 30-day cigarette or e-cigarette use. Additionally, there was no association between weight status and either tobacco product use in girls. However, obese boys, when compared with healthy weight boys, did have increased odds of past 30-day cigarette (AOR=4.52, 95% CI=1.32, 15.51) and past 30-day e-cigarette use (AOR=3.45, 95% CI=1.43, 8.33; Table 2).

DISCUSSION

This is the first study to examine the relationship between weight status and e-cigarette use among adolescents. Positive relationships were found between weight status and past 30-day use for both e-cigarettes and cigarettes, for boys, but not for girls. Specifically, obese boys, compared with their healthy weight peers, had increased odds of past 30-day cigarette and e-cigarette smoking.

Several studies have examined the cross-sectional relationship between weight status and cigarette use in youth. A 2004 review,⁶ summarized the literature to date and reported that seven of 12 studies (>50%) that examined boys found a positive relationship between weight status and cigarette smoking, whereas only five of 16 studies (<33%) that examined girls found a positive relationship. In three more recent studies that examined the relationship in both genders, all found a positive association in girls,^{4,5,7} and only one found the association in boys.⁷ This study's findings regarding cigarettes appear to be inconsistent with the bulk of the evidence from the recent literature, but perhaps consistent with older literature.

Few articles have examined the theoretical basis for these relationships.^{9,10} Many posit that cigarette use may be a method to control weight, to help with stress, or to fit in socially, all issues that overweight or obese youth may struggle with at greater rates than their healthy weight peers.^{5,6,8} Additionally, using cigarettes as a weight control method may appeal more to girls versus boys, as girls suffer greater negative social consequences from being overweight/obese.^{6,17,18} However, research has shown that one's dissatisfaction with their weight is a better predictor of cigarette use than their objective weight status.^{6,17,18} This may explain why the current study did not find a positive relationship in girls.

This study provides new evidence that the association between weight status and e-cigarette use warrants future research. Additionally, the inconsistency in the literature on cigarettes and weight status indicates there is still need for further research on this topic.^{4–7,9} For both products, conducting a longitudinal bidirectional analysis of the relationship is necessary to understand if weight status leads to e-cigarette/cigarette use or vice versa, or if there is not a causal association. Additionally, research is needed to determine what factors may mediate the relationship, such as depressive symptoms, tobacco product outcome expectations, or social marginalization.

Limitations

The current study utilizes a large ethnically diverse representative sample, but has limited generalizability beyond the study's urban Texas counties. Because the prevalence of past 30-day tobacco product use is low for this age group, some analyses may have been underpowered. The BMI data were self-reported, which tend to underestimate the prevalence of overweight/obesity and can be biased by gender. However, self-reported BMI can be valuable when it is the only source of epidemiologic data.²³

CONCLUSIONS

This paper found a positive relationship between obesity and past 30-day cigarette smoking for boys, but not for girls. This paper also provides new evidence that there may be a positive association between past 30-day e-cigarette use and obesity among boys, but not girls. Past 30-day cigarette and e-cigarette use was not associated with overweight status, for either boys or girls. Longitudinal research is needed to confirm these findings.

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Table 1

Subjects' Weight Status and Sociodemographic Characteristics

Demographic and product use categories	Overall (n=2,524; N=423,900)			Girls (n=1,434; N=205,274)			Boys (n=1,090; N=218,626)		
	n ^b	N ^c	Weighted prevalence, %	n ^b	N ^c	Weighted prevalence, %	n ^b	N ^c	Weighted prevalence, %
Weight status ^a									
Healthy weight	1,792	285,004	67.2	1,032	143,085	69.7	760	141,919	64.9
Overweight	372	74,115	17.5	220	32,877	16.0	152	41,238	18.9
Obese	360	64,780	15.3	182	29,312	14.3	178	35,468	16.2
Tobacco product use prevalence									
Ever tried cigarette smoking	317	55,156	13.0	179	30,352	14.8	138	24,804	11.3
Past 30-day cigarette smoking	42	5,400	1.3	26	3,275	1.6	16	2,125	1.0
Ever tried electronic cigarette smoking	553	98,133	23.2	311	52,033	25.3	242	46,101	21.1
Past 30-day electronic cigarette smoking	91	12,049	2.8	43	5,288	2.6	48	6,761	3.1
Race/Ethnicity									
Black	371	65,068	15.3	228	32,973	16.1	143	32,095	14.7
Hispanic	932	231,148	54.5	555	113,269	55.2	377	117,880	53.9
White/Other	1,221	127,683	30.1	651	59,032	28.8	570	68,651	31.4
SES									
Very well off	419	63,409	15.0	236	29,795	14.5	183	33,614	15.4
Living comfortably	1,631	273,242	64.5	907	128,336	62.5	724	144,905	66.3
Just getting by/Nearly poor/Poor	474	87,249	20.6	291	47,143	23.0	183	40,107	18.3
Grade									
7	673	131,025	30.9	389	60,412	29.4	284	70,613	32.3
9	857	150,040	35.4	467	73,273	35.7	390	76,767	35.1
11	994	142,834	33.7	578	71,589	34.9	416	71,246	32.6

^aWeight status categories are based on % BMI categories defined as the following: healthy weight (5th–84th percentile), overweight (85th–94th percentile), and obese (>95th percentile).^bUnweighted sample size.^cWeighted sample size.

Table 2AORs^a of Cigarette and Electronic Cigarette Behaviors by Weight Status,^b Stratified by Gender

Weight status categories	Overall OR (95% CI)	Girls OR (95% CI)	Boys OR (95% CI)
Ever tried cigarette smoking			
Healthy weight (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Overweight	0.76 (0.46, 1.25)	0.92 (0.54, 1.56)	0.64 (0.27, 1.51)
Obese	1.44 (0.99, 2.10)	1.25 (0.58, 2.69)	1.55 (0.82, 2.95)
Past 30-day cigarette smoking			
Healthy weight (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Overweight	0.29 (0.07, 1.32)	0.22 (0.02, 1.91)	0.56 (0.07, 4.55)
Obese	2.33 (1.14, 4.79)	1.26 (0.47, 3.39)	4.52 (1.32, 15.51)
Ever tried electronic cigarette smoking			
Healthy weight (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Overweight	1.29 (0.83, 2.01)	1.44 (0.88, 2.37)	1.17 (0.54, 2.52)
Obese	1.54 (1.03, 2.29)	1.40 (0.79, 2.49)	1.50 (0.81, 2.78)
Past 30-day electronic cigarette smoking			
Healthy weight (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Overweight	1.01 (0.35, 2.93)	0.24 (0.05, 1.12)	2.15 (0.62, 7.44)
Obese	2.65 (1.34, 5.24)	1.91 (0.73, 5.00)	3.45 (1.43, 8.33)

Notes: Boldface indicates statistical significance ($p < 0.05$).^a ORs adjusted for grade, SES, race/ethnicity, and gender.^b Weight status categories are based on % BMI categories defined as the following: healthy weight (5th–84th percentile), overweight (85th–94th percentile), and obese (>95th percentile).